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The White Nun and other Poems

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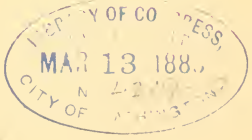
THE WHITE NUN

AND

OTHER POEMS

BY

AGNES L. CARTER



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THE WHITE NUN.

"A tale of the olden time.
The deeds of days gone by."

THE WHITE NUN.

I.

HIGH on the rock stands the gray chateau ;
Over the walls the ivies grow ;
Blue and bright in the vale below
Is the river flowing on.
Many and many a year ago
Here did she watch her lilies grow,
Watch the wind through the cornfields blow,
And the river flowing on.

Lost are the signs of heraldry,
Yet of a noble line was she,—
Lordly, royal, it well may be,—
Agnes of Beauvallon.
Oh, in those days of chivalry

Many a seigneur of high degree
Felt his heart beat fast to see
Agnes of Beauvallon !

Hear the story in passing by,
Under the shade of the castle high,
Under the blue midsummer sky,
By the river flowing on.
Over our heads the cloud-flakes fly,
Winds o'er the meadows breathe and sigh,
Flowers we have gathered droop and die,
By the river flowing on.

II.

Twilight rests on the castle gray,
Turrets and donjons looming dark ;
Shadowy grows the barbican,—
Corbels, gargoyles grim and stark.
Dim are the hills against the sky ;
In the garden the breeze has ceased to sigh ;

Dark is the river, but in the height
The glittering stars are ever bright.
Is it the beacon at Chateaunoir?
  Nay, it is a whiter sign.
Pale in its place grows every star,
  As the east begins to shine.
Brighter and brighter! the hills stand forth;
  All the heaven is softly glowing;
The valley lightens, and down in the north,
  Lo! we can see the river flowing.
A soft beam touches the chateau dim,
And its gray old towers in silver swim.
The moon climbs up; she is sad to-night,
  Yet she clothes the castle in glory sheen;
Tower and bartizan, buttress bright,
  Shine, with a sable shade between.
Listen! 'T is only a startled bird,
  Waked by the light, of dawning dreaming,
Plaintively chirps; then naught is heard;
  All is hushed in the silver gleaming.
Silence and sleep and moonshine chill
Rest upon valley and rock and hill.

Flashing and glancing into the river
A thousand silvery arrows shiver;
While over the hazy fields of corn
A slumberous murmur is borne.

Is it the whispering of the leaves
That tremble in silver air?
Or is it the rustle of silken robe
That softly brushes the stair?
The sleepy warder shudders and starts,
And crosses himself with a prayer,
As, swiftly flashing and swiftly lost,
He sees a flutter of white.
Is it the ghost of the bleeding nun
That crosses the shimmering night?

Bold must the climber be
Who scales the castle wall.
Where it verges on the crag
The chamois well might fall.
The maiden hearkens; her heart beats loud;
Yet not for herself she feels affright.
Oh! that some frail, white, wandering cloud

Would veil the moon ; it is too bright.
A shadow leans over the castle wall ;
It drops to her side, a gallant tall ;
And oh ! the arm is strong and tender
That circles and clasps her waist so slender !
While the river current flows full and strong,
And the moon looks down on Beauvallon.

III.

" Agnes, O my heart's beloved ! there is danger in our meeting ;
Woe is lurking in our love, and on us shines a baleful star ;
So to-night we kiss and part ; then let me hold thee, time is fleeting ;
Just one hour for love, and after, all my life for storm and war.

" Could I win thee, well thou knowest, I would venture life as lightly
As to-night I venture, climbing to the castle of my foe;

But 't is hopeless ; and the wan moon, visiting thy casement nightly,
Is not lonelier than I, as forth into the world I go.

"When another woos and wins thee, after long and loyal waiting,
Happier in name and fortune, though he love thee half so well,
Be not haunted by a pilgrim at some far shrine supplicating,
Nor by red-cross knight that drives before his sword the infidel."

"Do not mock me thus by doubting! Am I then less loyal-hearted
Than thyself? Alas! have I not loved thee since our eyes first met?
Can I find no convent-shelter, dost thou deem, when we are parted?
Can I find no death, beloved, if life scorn me, loving yet?

"Can I bear to hear the night-storm, watch the swaying
of the curtain,
All the waking night, not knowing whether on the
stormy sea,—
If on battle-plain, or desert, doth my lover rest; uncer-
tain
Even whether death hath silenced voice and heart so
dear to me?

"Raimond! Raimond!" sobbing softly, clinging to the
arms that hold her,
"Oh! my heart will break with aching for the tears
that will not flow!
Life is empty, save of anguish. O my true heart!"
growing bolder,
"Do not leave me! take me with thee! where thou
goest, let me go!"

"If it could be, sweet my darling—" "There is one
way, Raimond, listen!
Only be thou brave and fearless, both of living and of
dead.

See! already on the pavement doth the pallid moonbeam glisten;
It is late, yet hear my story, tale of horror and of dread."

IV.

"It is a strange, wild history,
My Raimond," she began,
"And shrouded deep in mystery;
But thus the story ran:

"Full five hundred years agone,
The Countess Agnes died.
She rests not by her brother's side
In the church at Beauvallon.
She sings not high in the choir above,
Though she wore the sacred veil;
For she sold her soul for a human love,
And our prayers may not avail.

"Oh! why, why, since young hearts are light,
And love is tender and true,

When the sky is soft and blue,
And life is so beautiful and bright,—
Why is it the best and holiest thing
To shut the light away,
And kneel and suffer and pray,
Like a bird in the dark that must not sing?

"This Agnes was sweet and fair, they say,
And they shut her away in the convent gray,
Out of sight of the bloom of May,
From hope and from love afar.
But she and her true knight loved so well—
I know not how the chance befell,
But this I have heard our minstrel tell,
And faithful his ballads are.

"She sat in her maiden bower one night;
The moonlight shone on her veil of white.
'To-morrow back to the sisterhood,
And silence, and anguish, and despair.'
Beyond the moat her lover stood,
He gazed at the wall, and the moonlit tower;

(My Raimond, never so bold as thou !)
' Alas ! there is but this fleeting hour !
O dear lost love, could I reach thee now ! '

" What is it that true love will not dare ?
It was she who dared, that night of dread.
Her white robe stained, in her lamp's light dim,
Through the opening portal she fled to him.
' Ask me not why this blade is red,
But fling it back over the castle wall
Or into the black moat let it fall.
And ask me not how I come to thee,
But oh ! if ever thou lovedst me,
Let us be gone, while we yet may flee.'

" But yet, for that horror unconfessed
Her spirit can nevermore find rest.
She wanders and wails through the lonely halls ;
On the midnight stair her footstep falls ;
And ever as the time returns
The ghostly light in her chamber burns ;

And slowly down the echoing stair
Her lamp and steel doth the white shape bear ;
And the gate that night stands open wide,
That the bleeding nun may unchallenged glide.

" O my beloved ! that night is near.
Love is too holy to dream of fear.
There, at the castle's eastern side,
There shalt thou wait on that fateful night ;
For it shall be my Raimond's bride
That passes forth in a veil of white."

Hark !
A sound through the dark
Like a burst of demon laughter !

They hear it not ; they heed it not ;
The moonlight, glancing white,
Creeps over and round the sheltering wall,
And lightens all the night.

And so they part,
With "Adieu, dear heart!"
And the silence falleth after.

V.

There 's a secret horror brooding on the castle's gayety.
There is none that cares to listen to the merry minstrelsy.

And they pale amid their laughter, all those dames and maidens bright;
And the lords are stern and silent, and the squires are grave to-night.

And the chaplain of the chateau says: "My children, let us pray
In the chapel until midnight that the curse may turn away;

"That the fiend may spend his malice on the foe who plots surprise;
That deceit may never prosper where these lordly towers rise."

Fair-haired Agnes is not with them, for her chamber is aglow,
Where the figures on the arras with the night-wind bend and flow,

Till they almost seem to whisper, and to beckon with the hand,
And she trembles for her secret, for they surely understand.

There is no moon in the heaven, through her casement high to win ;
Cloudy panes so thickly leaded will not let the starlight in.

Floating up across the stillness, " Miserere, Domine,"
Rises from the little chapel where her kindred kneel to pray.

And she murmurs, half unconscious : " Sweet St. Agnes, help and guard ! "
As the castle gate swings open, and the warders leave the yard.

Then she doffs the satin bodice, drops the azure silken
train ;
From her tiny feet reluctant strips the jewelled slippers
twain ;

Binds her shining hair the closer, lest some waving tress
should float ;
Clasps again the ropes of priceless pearls about the
snowy throat ;

And with eager haste she robes her in the long white
gown and veil ;
Grasps the knife in trembling fingers, and the silver lamp
so pale ;

And along the silent passage, and adown the stairway
dark,
And along the spacious corridor—Was that a footfall ?
Hark !

With a sense of something moving ever onward silently,
Still beyond the nearest turning, where her strained eyes
cannot see ;

And a thrill of ghostly essence in the horror-thronged
night,
Till the quickened ear feigns noises, and the heart is sick
with fright.

And at last the court-yard stretches dimly at the open
door.
Fluttering white along the shadows, *what is that that goes
before ?*

VI.

He stands by the gateway,
His heart beating high ;
She comes, the beloved !
The moment is nigh.

Lo ! see, the faint glimmer,
The lamp's lustre pale,
Now ghastly revealing
The garment and veil.

As nearer and nearer
It glides through the shade,
He sees the dark blood-stains,
The knife's naked blade.

Slow gliding—slow gliding—
The gate nearly past—
He springs from his hiding
To claim her at last.

She sees from the court-yard
Her Raimond's arms spread
To clasp the White Horror—
The Spectre—the Dread !

One shriek strained and piercing,
And wild with affright !
The lamp strikes the pavement,
And quenched is the light.

A weird shout of laughter
Doth eerily ring ;
From buttress and archway
Faint echoes take wing.

VII.

Over the sky have the cloud-wreaths flown ;
Still in the trees the wind makes moan ;
Still in its soft and tranquil tone
Is the river flowing on.
Nay, the story is not my own ;
Little more of the tale is known,
Vaguest whispers and hints alone,
By the river flowing on.

Peasants will darkly shake the head :
Ah, madame, 't is a tale of dread ;
Better the less of her be said—
Agnes of Beauvallon.
Found they the maiden wellnigh dead ;
Ere she was shriven her soul was fled.
Heaven have mercy on souls ill sped—
Agnes of Beauvallon.

Lonely the chateau stands to-day,
Rent and ruined, o'ergrown and gray,

Looking down where the willows sway,
Where the river floweth on.
Few are the tourists led this way :
Fewer for Agnes' tale will stay ;
Why, she has long been dust, they say,
Where the river floweth on.

EPILOGUE.

I read the story by the sea.
The red glow died on the sand,
And the glimmering sails of the fishing-boats
Drew nearer the foam-fringed land.

O foolish hearts ! that greet the ghost
Of Fame, or of Science' lore !
O arms that reach for Love, and clasp
The Shape that goes before !

And while I mused, a golden moon
Looked over the pale, blue sea,
And laid a path of wavering gold
Across to the sands and me.

The rosy air to violet grew,
With amber the clouds were bright;
A long, dark line of wandering birds
Flew southward through waning light.

WILD FLOWERS.

WILD FLOWERS.

SPRINGTIME PROMISE.

THE winter whiteness in the air
We see no longer anywhere ;
Instead, a rich, warm air of gold
All sunny places seem to hold ;
And April, fair coquette, is here,
The true beginning of the year.

O bare brown twigs, we smile to mark
The small green tufts that stud your bark !
O blades of shining grass, we see
With joy your springtime prophecy !
O time of promise ! time of youth !
If all your semblance could be truth !

O world of green! where sign nor sight
Of death or age can come to blight,
We 've seen too many springs to wait
Fulfilment of your promise late;
And if our hearts beat fast, we smile;—
You promise only to beguile.

We know that summer comes full soon,
With sultry eve and burning noon;
We know already there will be
Some dry leaves clinging to the tree;
And many a perfect bud of hope
To an imperfect flower will ope.

Though gladness clothe the springtime still,
The worm will mar, the storm will kill.
We cannot share the child's delight
To see the earth so gay and bright:
And yet it would be all too sad
To mourn when all around is glad.

And those who know joy's fleeting reign
Must hail it as it comes again.

Could flowers unfading be more sweet
Than these that blossom at our feet?
So fair, so bright, is every thing,
We half believe thy promise, Spring.

OPENING SPRING.

FAIR, oh! fair is April weather!
Tender green bedecks the day;
All the young leaves laugh together:
Sweeter yet is May.

Heart restored, thy pain forgetting,
Oh! be happy and be strong!
Murmur not, the past regretting,
"Here dwelt sorrow long."

Oh! be grateful! do not hinder
Thus the heart's glad blossoming!
God it was who gave the winter;
He has sent the spring.

APPLE BLOSSOMS.

AN old tree blushes in fairy bloom,
In the beautiful world of May,
When the sky is blue, and the wood is green,
And the fields are fair and gay.

An old man stands at a cottage door,
Weary and old, ah me!
"There is the tree I used to climb,—
The very same old tree.

"Every thing blossoms into youth
Every returning year.
My life has had its blossoming times,
And its winters, long and drear.

"This is the fairest of all my springs;
Maybe the last of all.
I may know what the flowers of heaven are,
Before these blossoms fall."

IN MAYTIME.

BRIGHT sunshine ushers in
The fairy month of May;
The tiny leaves uncurl,
And all the world is gay.

The hills are green once more,
And musically run
The brooks, o'er pebbles bright
That sparkle in the sun.

Again the flowers bloom
In sunshine and in rain;
But the same sweet rose we knew
Will blossom never again—
Never again!

The same old music sounds;
We sing the same old air;
We choose the same old seat;
We wander everywhere

Through paths we used to love,
  Through books we used to read,—
But now it makes us sad.
  Are they the same indeed?

We seek the old-time charm,
  But ever seek in vain;
For the thoughts of other years
  Will waken never again—
    Never again!

Oh! foolish heart, and sad!
  Those flowers and days are past,
They could not make us blest
  If they could always last.

God is forever true;
  And, if we live aright,
Life is forever grand;
  And forward, all is light.

Over all dead delight
  We will no more complain;

And the doubts that haunt us now
Shall darken never again—
Never again !

BUTTERCUPS.

SPRING has doffed her festival raiment,
New leaves' delicate green ;
Fragile blossoms have drooped or broken ;
Sultrier bloom is seen.

Work-day garments of darker verdure
Drape every tree and field ;
Thoughtful pansies ard cheerful daisies
Garden and meadow yield.

Day by day brings us new surprises ;
What shall we see to-day ?
Lo ! bright flecks in the flashing sunshine,
Golden buttercups sway.

Golden buttercups sway and glitter,
Dainty and wild and sweet ;
Lithely swing with the waving grasses,
Dotting the slope at our feet.

Dear little joyous, sunny natures,
Glad of springtime and life ;
Merry and careless of any shadow ;
Natures with frolic rife.

All things murmur of summer's coming.
Skies are sunny and clear ;
Winds are soft with a hundred odors ;
Peerless roses are here.

Fields are white with the sweep of daisies ;
Bluebells nod by the stream ;
Brightest of all, in the morning sunshine,
Golden buttercups gleam.

A FORGOTTEN PICTURE.

TRANGELY gleams the old house in the shadows gray,
Full of half-sad memories of a long-lost day ;
Darkly sway the branches, at the windows high
Knocking still for entrance, as in days gone by.

O'er the ruined door-way roses used to climb ;
In the happy evenings of that olden time,
Sat we in the shadow as the night came down,
Singing songs forgotten in the noisy town.

Strange to walk so lonely through the dear old hall ;
Strange to wake the echoes in the arches tall ;
Strange indeed the silence, sadness, and regret,
Where dwelt mirth and gladness, unforgotten yet.

Strange looks in the darkness each remembered room ;
Dim forms rise around me, starting from the gloom ;
Faces dear in childhood all around I see ;
Many friendly voices speak to welcome me.

Buried friends of childhood, come not back again ;
Why should *happy* mem'ries fill the heart with pain ?
I will light the fire to chase the gloom away—
Live but in the present—think but of to-day.

As the ruddy firelight gleams along the hall,
Many well-known faces look down from the wall.
One alone among them I remember not ;
One of such rare beauty, strange I had forgot.

'T is a little maiden, bright-haired, azure-eyed ;
Some young mother's darling, some fond father's pride.
Fairy child, who art thou ? Little Goldenhair !
Like an angel vision, wonderfully fair !

Oh ! the simple beauty of the little child,
In the world's temptation, pure and undefiled.
Will the years of trouble make that face less fair ?
Years of sin and sorrow leave their traces there ?

Ah ! I start in wonder,—strange I had not known !
In the corner written is a name—my own !
Ah ! the years of trouble, years of sorrow wild,
Stole away the likeness to the little child.

How that form will haunt me with its simple grace !
I am full of sadness, standing face to face
With my long-lost childhood, thus brought back to light,
After years whose shadows hid it from my sight.

I will hide the picture, lest my heart should break ;
Such regret and sadness does its beauty wake.
Oh ! what brings most sorrow in the dear old place,
Is this simple picture of my own child-face.

NOW.

WE dream in a cloudy Future,
Whether stormy, or dull, or sweet ;
The waves of Time sweep ever
Old memories to our feet.

The dead Past rules our Future ;
The crown is upon his brow :
But we *live* in an endless Present ;—
We *act* in a shifting Now.

The Past has given us courage,
Even while it gave us pain ;
But the Future gives us nothing,
And we wait for it in vain.

But *Now* is the glorious warfare,
And the victory, *To-day ;*
Until Time shall be no longer,
And the worlds be swept away.

AFTER-THOUGHT.

THE birds are singing loudly
Upon the maple bough ;
But sweeter was the chorus
When once, a bright sky o'er us,
We talked of years before us.
I remember now,

We did not note the brightness,
Till o'er the mountain's brow
The storm came ; nor the singing,

Till far the birds were winging,
And only dead leaves clinging
To the maple bough.

Oh ! friend, I did not know thee ;
My light heart would not bow :
Not as when earth confined thee,
Since Heaven has closed behind thee,
Since ne'er the heart can find thee,
Oh ! I love thee now !

THE REIGN OF SUMMER.

SUMMER mounts her radiant throne,
Claims all nature as her own ;
Herald breezes glide and sweep,
Rustle, shiver, shift, and peep,
Whispering, calling, everywhere,
Through the myriad-scented air,
"Summer reigns ! "

See how flower, and leaf, and bird,
Gather courage at the word !
Now no more the shivering fear
Of the frost can enter here.
Spring's hilarious merriment
Turns to sober, still content.
Summer reigns.

Now the birds will gayly sing
Calmer lays than those of spring ;
Poets losing that wild thrill
Youth and hope take with them still ;
Dream and hope and youth are gone,
But the poet-heart sings on—
Summer strains.

Some of us, whose dreaming days
Brought to us no fame nor praise,
Grasp our weapons with a will,
Vowing to be heroes still ;
There is still a world to win ;
What time better to begin ?
Summer reigns.

Some, who read no sorrow yet
In the grass-blade bent and wet ;
Young, and confident, and strong,—
May that courage last them long !—
Find the rainbow's trust of gold
Near enough to have and hold—
Summer gains.

Lift the curtain. Lo ! what light
Spreads the sky with sudden white !
Like fierce moonlight, if the moon
Might be angry at night's noon.
And the eager, gentle showers
Make wild music through the hours—
Summer rains.

Summer in our path may lay
Chances lightly cast away ;
Summer brings the transient friend ;
Summer sees the friendship's end ;
Cheers, arouses, glides away ;
While we listen, while we stay,
Summer wanes.

In the moonlight, on the sea,
In the wind, the sunshine free,
In glad eyes and laughing voice,
In the hearts that must rejoice,
In recovered song once lost,
In recovered hopes once crossed,—
Summer reigns.

THE LAY OF THE FIRST MOSQUITO.

WHEN the earth is green, and the sky is bright,
And the birds do gayly sing;
When the flowers bloom in the summer light,
And the butterflies take wing,—
I come! I come! you may hear my song,
So clear—so sweet—so sweet!
On the summer breeze I am borne along,
With the first delicious heat.

The roses are there to welcome me,
And the fragrant heliotrope;
And the honeysuckles joyfully
Their sweet, fresh blossoms ope.

I come ! I come ! you shall hear my song,
So blithe—so gay—so gay !
And cheerfully all the summer long
You shall hear my festive lay.

By the riverside, by the lake, I float
On the air of sweet July ;
I shall meet you there as you ply your boat,
When the sunset hour is nigh.
I come ! I come ! do you hear my song?
By day—by night—by night !
So pensive out in the twilight long,
So soft by candle-light.

Where the moonlight sparkled upon the stream,
Two young lovers wandered by ;
I joined my song to their loving dream—
I could hear the maiden sigh.
I come ! I come ! with a wild, sweet song—
A soft, delirious hum.
Does its music please? You have waited long,
But now, dear maid, I come !

ON THE BEACH.

THE white beach slopes down to the sea,
A stretch of shining sand ;
A narrow strip of common ground
Between the sea and land.

The blue waves with their snowy crests
Rush shouting to our feet,
And, falling there, more quiet grow
As backward they retreat.

All through the sunny summer day
The sky above is bright ;
The ocean wears a darker blue,
And flashes back the light.

And here, with pencil or with book,
We pass the time away ;
Or, better far, in deep, strange thoughts
We spend the idle day.

And here the little children come,
With wooden spade and pail,
To build their tiny towers and forts,
For great waves to assail.

Or, while the ocean still chants on
In solemn, mighty tone,
They raise a mountain wondrous high,
Which the next day is gone.

Or, sometimes, dig a little grave—
Ah, me ! what pain it brings
To see the happy children play
With such sad, mournful things !

My children, when you older grow,
And live less carelessly,
Oh ! you will look with other eyes
Upon the summer sea.

Then will you know what mighty things
Are ruined by the waves
As lightly as your little forts,
Your towers, and sandy graves

Oh ! how we toil at little things,
We children and we men ;
Nor think how soon the laughing waves
Will cover them again !

We build our towers, and fondly think
They will forever stand :
Alas ! they are beside the sea,
And only built of sand.

And I, who have in dreams like these
Spent half my summer day,
As eager as the children are
To make a toil of play,

What shall I do when evening comes,
And the advancing tide
Flows o'er a beach all smooth and white,
In majesty and pride ;

When the night breeze, so keen and cold,
Sweeps past me from the land,
And not a trace is left to me
Of all my walls of sand ?

THE ANGLER.

INTO the very heart of June,
Into the breezes and leaves,
Up where the brook through mountain moss
Way for its waters cleaves ;
Up the lane by the pasture bars ;
On, through the sweet wild roses ;
On, where the huckleberries grow ;
On, where the footpath closes.

On, where the birches, slim and straight,
White through the foliage gleam ;
On, he follows the winding way
Cautiously, up the stream ;
On and on, with his fishing-rod
Resting against his shoulder :
This is the place, at last ! at last !
Under the great, gray boulder.

Song of birds in the branches hid ;
Passing winds faintly sweet ;
Voice of the brook that ripples on
Softly beneath his feet ;

Lovely wild flowers, oh ! everywhere !
Bluebells daintily swinging ;
Were there ever such delicate ferns ?
Was there ever such singing ?

Far away—oh, far in the sky !
Waves the blue mountain-line ;
Down below, through the parted boughs,
White the cottages shine ;
Sweetly, oh ! sweetly, the livelong day,
Faintly the herd-bells tinkle ;
Safely the trout, in the clear brown stream,
Merrily dart and twinkle.

Have you forgotten, my happy boy,
Have you forgotten quite ?
When came this fisherman home before
Empty-handed at night ?
Let him the empty basket hide ;
He is ashamed to show it.
Who shall tell what the June has done ?
The boy has become a poet.

FIRST LOVE.

THE light of the early morning
Has the waiting hill-tops kissed,
And shot down into the valley,
Still wrapped in a golden mist.

Above, in the leafy branches,
The birds have begun to sing ;
They know when the day is fairest,
And are early in wakening.

In the rosy gold of morning
Does the world anew begin,
As if freshly then created,
And freed from the curse of sin.

The earth awakes in its beauty
From the darkness of the night,
All sparkling over with dew-drops,
And flashing with rainbow light.

So the heart awakes from sorrow ;
And, after darkness and tears,
Comes the glory of the morning,
With the hope of better years.

I stand in the open gateway,
Where the orchard grass is wet ;
This is scarce a time for thinking,
But here do I linger yet.

Since the first faint flush of dawning
Glowed over the eastern hill,
I 've stood gazing into the orchard,
And here I am standing still.

The breeze with its dewy freshness,
And the beauty all around,
Away to the westward call me,
Where the hills with light are crowned.

There are many voices calling
Where the earliest sunbeams fall ;
But that which calls to the orchard
Is the sweetest voice of all.

The trees bend their loaded branches
To the dew-besprinkled grass ;
And the scenes of youth, in fancy,
'Neath their shadows seem to pass.

There are some who mock such fancies ;
I, too, have been one, I know ;
Yet I think almost with envy
Of my fair dream, long ago.

And when I am musing, sometimes,
With a tender half-regret,
The dream of my old love haunts me,
And forbids me to forget.

My friend, do you still think of me ?
Or have you forgotten quite
The talks in the shady orchard,
The walks in the moonlight bright ;

The parting that summer evening,
When we stood here hand in hand ;
The kind wishes that went with me
To a lonely foreign land ?

There was ne'er a promise given ;
  There was ne'er a vow to break ;
I am glad, for more pure and holy
  That thought seems our love to make.

It was not death that divided—
  Ah ! that had been greater pain ;
'T would have bound my heart so closely
  That I could not love again.

Though the years brought no forgetting,
  Though our love did not grow cold,
There are other hearts to love us,
  There are other ties to hold.

For life brings us love more precious
  Than our early youth can know ;
And, through grief and disappointment,
  We are thankful it is so.

A season of hope and gladness
  Is the summer time of youth ;
But better to walk with Sorrow
  Than never to meet with Truth.

'T is good to see life before us,
But better when life is o'er ;
'T is good to start on the voyage,
But better to reach the shore.

The morn is the gladdest hour,
But we love it not the best ;
For the failing light of evening
Brings the time of peace and rest.

BY THE BROOK.

THE brooklet its song in the stillness playeth ;
The bird-notes fall through the leafy screen ;
And there may be seen where the bright stream strayeth,
The forms of children among the green.

Down there by a curve the water roundeth,
They play they are men and women to-day ;
How strangely quiet their laughter soundeth !
The children are having a serious play.

Then into the circle the zephyr flingeth
So lightly the sound of the mother's call;
The brook floweth on and the bird still singeth,
And they are children again, after all.

But we—we sit where the brooklet floweth,
And wish we could find it all a play,
A dream, or a song—this swift life that goeth,—
And we were children again to-day.

A something there is, all our dreams that chilleth;
We cannot play we are children now;
Our thoughts will not run as pleasure willeth,
Though the bird sing sweetly upon the bough.

Poor tired children! the Father knoweth:
He takes in His own the hands that part;
And out of the sadness a beauty groweth,
When His touch is felt on the troubled heart.

A LESSON BY THE WAYSIDE.

" LEAVE all that for common minds,"
With gesture proud he said to me ;
"In Nature's book, wide open thrown,
We read what they can never see.

"For common people, vulgar toil :
Be mine the intellectual task ;
I 've learning, books, and health, and wealth ;
And time for them is all I ask."

This said, he bowed and went his way,
While I stood leaning on the gate,
And watched him down the dusty road
Walk briskly on, for he was late.

Firm friends of youth were we ; and I,
Junior in years, was more mature
In thought and feeling,—learning doubt
Of things that he regarded sure.

But learning slowly, thinking out,
Grand truths that he had never known:
And so he left me at the gate,
That summer morning, all alone.

I thought: "Oh! youthful, proud, and strong,
What raises you above your kind,
And gives the right to choose your work,
Ungranted to the 'common mind'?"

I passed the gate, and wandered out
Along the way whence he had come,—
The road which found an end at length
Before the tall gates of his home.

A glorious day! beside the road
The wild flowers bloomed beneath the wall;
Above the hills sailed fleecy clouds,
And golden sunshine flooded all;

O'er scented meadows blew the wind,
And wafted fragrance everywhere;
The brook sang to the sighing trees:
All earth was lovely, pure, and fair.

But sad and heavy was my heart;
Words haunt us, when we know not why;
It seemed to me my young friend's words
Unveiled a painful verity.

And the blue heavens, the fragrant air,
The beauty 'round, the warmth and light,
Were all too full of careless joy
For a world where wrong had conquered right.

Thus musing, "Is it so?' I said;
"Is wrong so strong that right must fail?
It cannot be! Where God is King
The right is might, and must prevail."

I could not still my puzzled thoughts.
In hopeful youth, when trouble sleeps,
We wish God's work were in our hands,
To re-create the world He keeps.

So still anew in various forms
The question rose, nor answer came;
Still I espoused the weaker cause—
I thought it so, which means the same.

"Does God with beauty clothe the earth
Just for a chosen favored few?
His sun on evil shines, and good,
And 'common minds' can feel it too.

"And when the Saviour dwelt on earth,
'T is written in the holy Word,
Rulers and scribes rejected Him,
But 'common people' gladly heard.

"Yet what of that? A palace wall
Has oft enclosed a 'common mind';
While lofty genius, all men know,
In lowly cottage we may find."

Just then I chanced to raise my eyes,
And leaning on a fence close by,
I saw a farmer, who, with pride,
Was gazing on his field of rye.

"A 'common mind,'" I thought, and smiled;
"A pleasant day!" I paused awhile;
"Good for the crops." He gave assent,
And turned to meet me with a smile.

I leaned beside him on the rail,
And talked a space on common themes;
Then watched the waves of wind-swept rye,
And spoke at random, dreaming dreams.

Something recalled my wandering mind,
Refreshed my thoughts like rain on flowers,
And brightened all my darkening day,
Like sudden sunbeams after showers.

"Strange, truly," my companion said;
"Look at this flower here at our feet;
A hundred up on yonder hill
Are just as lovely, smell as sweet;

"But just because they 're far away
They 're hidden somehow in the grass,
And you might think them common weeds,
Unless close by them you should pass."

Then, mindful of some waiting task,
He spoke a farewell, courteous, kind;
I lingered busy with new thoughts
Suggested by the "common mind."

Is it those only who are near,
Or only those who study well,
Who seem to us uncommon men?
Are any common? Who can tell?

I stooped and plucked the lovely flower,
And marked its beauty, form, and hue;
And thought, 't was by the common road
That it was found,—a lesson, too.

I walked on, 'neath the sunny sky;
The world, transformed, looked fair and bright:
I felt the beauty everywhere,
And found in all a new delight.

I reached the gates of the estate
Where dwelt my friend, and stayed to rest.
To rival Nature's common work
The stately park had done its best.

And, looking through, within the gates
A flower like mine I chanced to see;
The same by roadside, and in park—
Another lesson this for me.

When deepening shades of afternoon
Back to my gate the student brought,
I gave to him my wayside flower,
And told the lessons it had taught.

He listened gravely—shut the flower
Between his Plato's classic leaves ;
Then, laughing, answered with a jest,
As one unwelcome truth receives.

We often walk in field and park,
Or where through shade the brooklet winds,
Yet in our talk I have not heard
Another word of "common minds."

And I have learned that I can find
For every question some reply,
If it be only, "Wait and trust,"
But now God answers, and not I.

AN OLIVE LEAF.

SENT a prayer on fluttering wings
Across the waste of waters dark ;
Without an answer it returned,
With weary pinions, to the ark.

I prayed for joy, which had been lost,
So long a time, beneath the flood :
God waited for a second prayer,
And answered as He thought it good.

If I had prayed for faith, I think
A quicker answer might have come ;
The tears that stain some prayers of ours,
A clearer brightness give to some.

Again I watched my white-winged dove
Fly off beneath the clouded skies,
Till distance hid her, or, perchance,
It was the tears that dimmed my eyes.

Oh, glad return ! Oh, sweet reply !
It made my tears, my murmurs cease ;
I asked for happiness, but lo !
The loving Father sent me—peace.

HOW THE STORM BEGAN.

A FLEET wind over the meadows came,
Where thousand daisies grew,
And, driven on, the little clouds
In hurrying squadrons flew.

A brown cloud mounted on its wings,
And drove up through the sky ;
It hung above the arrow bright
On the white church-spire so high.

Then the daisy heads began to bow,
They wildly rocked and swayed ;
The buttercups bent, the ferns grew pale,
And shivered as if afraid.

Then, bending with a liquid rush,
The grass together flowed;
The dark maize-ribbons rustling streamed;
The gray dust hid the road.

The tree tops surged; the struggling boughs
Against each other crashed;
The locust cracked, the beech-tree roared;
The sudden lightning flashed!

The sky grew black with driven clouds;
The dark air shuddered under;
The dark earth listened, waited, thrilled!
Suddenly growled deep thunder,

And, muffled, rolled back through the clouds.
The flashing rain swept in,
And dropped a curtain on the hills:
So did the storm begin.

THE PRESSED FLOWERS.

NOT at my will, but at their own,
The leaves fall open wide :
A pansy and a heliotrope,
Close-pressed, lie side by side.

" I love you," and " You have my thoughts,"—
So speak the flowers brown.
Through what long years, from what kind heart,
Comes this sweet message down ?

So long, so long, so long ago !
Whose was the hand that laid
The flowers here, and shut them in ?
To guess I am afraid.

And with what hopes, or with what fears,
Or with what shy intent,—
Perhaps to meet the eyes of one
To whom the book was lent ;

Perhaps to mark the words beneath,
On which they leave a stain
(This sign of kind approval, thus,
Will lastingly remain).

Perhaps the meaning did not reach
The careless girlish mood ;—
Some flowers from the garden brought
To this dull solitude.

Perhaps here left in memory
Of tender words half said ;
With happy blush and bashful thrill—
Poor flowers, crushed and dead !

Perhaps placed thus with loving touch,
When tears had ceased to flow ;
The pledge of what could be no more—
This I can never know.

They were so sweet, and fresh, and fair,
When they were laid away ;
They come to me so dry and brown,
So dark and dead to-day !

The sweetness was not meant for me ;
It passed so long ago.
Yes, close the book, it makes me sad,
Yet why I do not know.

A BUTTERFLY.

'T WAS as I sat in the window,
To-day, when the sun was high,
I saw flit by in the sunlight
A scarlet butterfly.

With never the faintest flutter
It sailed through the golden light,
With its beautiful wings wide-spreading ;
You scarce could call it flight.

Afar from the country meadows,
From the flowery wayside grass,
It had drifted into the city ;
'T was good to see it pass.

We called aloud to each other,
As we saw it float this way ;
And I think God must have made it
To cheer our hearts to-day.

For life looked hard this morning,
The world seemed harsh and cold ;
And its restlessness and hurry
Had made us sad and old.

But now the youth and the gladness
Are coming back again ;
For the happiness God gives us
Outweighs our care and pain.

Oh ! stay in the noisy city,
My gay, bright butterfly !
There 's honey in city gardens,
There 's blue in city sky.

And visit some other window
As you have come to ours,
That weary hearts may remember
The sunlight and the flowers.

A GRAY DAY.

THE summer ocean lieth
Serene, and glad, and bright.
The weary summer dieth ;
Dead is the sea's delight.

A day in mid September,
Faint, delicate, and gray ;
Oh ! all of us remember
One such September day.

The sky droops, chill and weary ;
Beneath it mourns the sea ;
While, comfortless and dreary,
The waves toss restlessly.

It is the phantom only
Of some dead summer day,
And, sorrowful and lonely,
It sinks in mist away.

OUR ELSIE.

WHEN they tauld our Elsie he was dead—
That Robin would come nae mair,
It went to my heart to hear her greet,—
She grieved for him sae sair, Archie,
She grieved for him sae sair.

But when they said that he was fause,
And little worth her tears ;
When she must needs believe it true,
After the love o' years, Archie,
After the love o' years ;

Ah, fain noo wad I see her greet,
Nor check her noo as then ;
But when the heart is broken, lad,
The tears come ne'er again, Archie,
The tears come ne'er again.

AN AUTUMNAL RAIN.

NOW from the gaunt trees, one by one
The leaves come hovering down,
To drift along the blackened road,
And tinge the pools with brown.

And, pattering fast, the eager drops
Are dashing on the pane :
A little yellow hickory stands
Forlornly in the rain.

O little maple, green and gold !
No other thing looks gay ;
My heart salutes you with her song
This gloomy autumn day.

How much is gained, how much is lost,
Since last the leaves fell dead !
I would forget the year's long pain,
And count its gains instead.

Thank God we are not always young !
Our hearts must break ere long,
But that, in tempest and in pain,
Trust grows so sure and strong.

The heart grows restful after tears,
And love no longer grieves,
While drearily and wearily
The rain drops on the leaves.

SONG-BIRDS.

WHEN all the little birds that sing
In summer days so long,
For other lands have spread the wing,
And we have lost the song,

Oh ! then returns the power of song,
That left me in the spring ;
The little birds that slept so long
Wake in my heart and sing.

The heart can sing and can rejoice
When all the earth is dumb ;
Its deep emotions find a voice.
Oh ! silent Autumn, come !

INDIAN SUMMER.

OLD over fold of soft, gray cloud
Sweeps upward from the west.
It is the late November time,
The time I love the best.

The leaves come dancing up the walk,
To meet me as I go.
Beneath the beech-tree wide is spread
A pallid yellow glow.

Beneath the oak, the rich, dark brown
Is flushed with scarlet stains ;
And here and there a vivid streak
Of golden green remains.

But, oh ! the splendid maple leaves !
How bright their red and gold !
They blow across the faded grass,—
And so the year grows old.

Above, the pencilled skeleton
Of each denuded bough,
Traced delicately on the clouds,
Stands out full clearly now.

On former days the autumn clouds
Were bright with rose and gold ;
And purple, crimson, scarlet, blue,
The sunset mists uprolled ;

But now a pearly softness shines
Through all the sky's faint gray,
The warmth of Indian summer steals
Upon the air to-day.

They say the time is sorrowful,—
It seems so glad to me ;
So full of promises fulfilled,
And rest that is to be.

To-day my heart is full of song,
I cannot tell you why,
While listening to the rustling leaves,
Beneath the sombre sky.

MELANCHOLY DAYS.

UNDER skies unclouded
Forest trees stand crowded,
Round the brook o'ershrouded
By their leaves.

Birds are southward flying;
Slow the leaves are dying;
Zephyr, sobbing, sighing,
O'er them grieves.

Down the water drifting,
Where the sunlight, shifting
Through the boughs uplifting,
Gilds the wave:

Done their airy mission ;
Slow with indecision
Is their soft transition
To the grave.

AGAINST HOPE.

THE skies are gray with autumn storms,
The paths are dark and wet.
'T is the wind that strips the trees so fast,
For winter comes not yet.

The beds are strewn with broken plants
Which late were all in bloom.
'T is the rain that beats them into the sod ;
But winter does not come.

It is the chill and damp of rain,
And not a faithless fear,
That makes me falter and tremble so ;
For winter is not here.

The frost has turned the latest leaves,
And bronzed the grass-grown hill.
It is late—it is late—ah no, my love!
The winter lingers still.

And yet 't is hard to wait so long,
To stay alone at home.
But he said, "before the winter comes,"
And winter has not come.

AN UNKNOWN LANGUAGE.

THERE is nothing half so pleasant
When the night begins to fall,
As to watch the firelight flicker
Up and down the shadowed wall;

And to listen, in the stillness
Of the ever-dark'ning room,
To the red flames, laughing, talking
To each other, in the gloom.

In the world there is a language
Which to us is all unknown ;
And we cannot find the meaning—
Make the mystery our own.

Yet how oft, in dreamy twilight,
Strange, soft voices reach the heart ;
Though we cannot understand them,
They may soothe the pain and smart.

And the low voice of the fire
Soundeth very sweet to me ;
Though the language it is speaking
Still remains a mystery.

THE LATCH-KEY.*

WELL I love the sound of music,
Wheresoever it be heard ;
From the grand roll of the organ
To the voice of little bird ;

* Originally published in *Demorest's Magazine*.

But there is a sound more precious,
That my spirit loveth more ;
'T is the sound I hear at even
Of the latch-key in the door.

When the street-lamps have been lighted,
In the twilight cold and gray,
Flashes out a friendly greeting
From the windows o'er the way ;
And the signal we have answered,
As we oft have done before ;
Then I sit, and waiting, listen
For the latch-key in the door.

When the storm is wildly raging,
And I draw the curtains tight,
To keep out the cold and darkness,
And keep in the warmth and light ;
To keep in the peace and comfort,
And keep out the tempest's roar ;—
Working busily, I listen
For the latch-key in the door.

When the room is bright and pleasant,
And the table set for tea ;
When his chair and book and slippers
Are placed just as they should be ;
When the light, uncertain, flickers
O'er the ceiling and the floor ;
Then I watch it, silent, listening
For the latch-key in the door.

Oft when I am faint and weary,—
For my labor is not light—
After a long day of working,
Sitting down to rest at night ;
When my head is tired of thinking,
And my heart is aching sore,
Naught can cheer me like the clicking
Of the latch-key in the door.

Then my heart beats lighter, quicker,
And my smile is bright and gay ;
Oh ! how much we help each other
As we pass along life's way.

Often has the day seemed shorter,
  Lighter seemed the load I bore,
Looking forward to the evening,
  When the latch-key 's in the door.

I will pray that God may spare us
  To each other many a day ;
And that we may walk together
  All the long and toilsome way.
I will thank Him for His blessings,
  But for this than others more,—
That I 've one to love, and listen
  For his latch-key in the door.

UNCROWNED.

WHERE hast Thou left Thy glory,
  O Thou eternal King ?
Thy majesty and greatness,
  Which all the angels sing ?

No rays of light celestial
Are shining on Thy brow.
Where is Thy crown, my Saviour,
And where Thy sceptre now?

He comes from highest heaven
On earth as man to stay;
He lies in humblest cradle,
A little child to-day.

To-day our human nature
Becomes a sacred thing;
God made, and God has worn it.
All hail! Thou crownless King!

Oh, glorious in beauty!
And hast Thou come to die?
Thy wonderful atonement
Shall wake new praise on high.

The sweetest songs of heaven
Recall Thy death of pain.
"All blessing, glory, honor,
Unto the Lamb once slain!"

We hail Thee, King anointed,
To rescue us who came!
We praise Thee! We adore Thee!
We magnify Thy name!

IN AN OLD CHURCH.

I SIT within the dear old walls,
And low and sweet the music falls
On my unheeding ear;
All here seems quietness and peace,
And yet my spirit cannot cease
To mourn what is not here.

New things are better, so they say;
Yet I would fain go back to-day
Through years that now have flown,
To spend one Sabbath-day once more
Like some that I have known before,
That are forever gone.

Not always do we wish the *best ;*
Ofttimes the heart finds truer rest
In what is old and tried,
Which constant use makes doubly dear ;
New songs we scarcely care to hear,
When old ones are denied.

Closer each day my heart will cling
To every old familiar thing
That still is left to me ;
Against each change my thoughts rebel ;
Wherefore it is *I* cannot tell ;
My eyes no good can see.

The dear old hymns are seldom sung ;
I wander on new tunes among,
And there no comfort find ;
And outward forms, it seems to me,
Should show the soul's solemnity,
The calmness of the mind.

New sights, new sounds, await me now ;
New faces all around me bow ;
The old friends are not there.

My eyes with bitter tears are wet,
Although I struggle to forget,
And raise my heart in prayer.

Jerusalem ! Jerusalem !
My soul could often weep with them
Who mourn thy glories fled !
Oh ! did I love old ways too well ?
Was it an unblest shrine that fell ?
An idol that lies dead ?

Where is the voice whose tones could start
The inmost feelings of my heart,
And bring my thoughts to light ?
I miss thee, O my friend, my friend !
All grief for thee has had an end ;
All sorrow taken flight.

If it be weak so close to cling
To any merely human thing,
Then I indeed am weak.
But who can teach as thou hast taught ?
Or who can catch my trembling thought,
And answer ere I speak ?

But God called His beloved home ;
And joyfully His child did come,
To lean on Jesus' breast ;
And, though my eyes with tears are dim,
I, too, will follow after Him,
And find in Him my rest.

O Thou whom first I learned to name !
Though all else change, Thou art the same ;
Thy years shall know no end !
My waiting eyes look up to Thee ;
I know, through all eternity
Thou still wilt live, my Friend !

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